

Kunapipi

Volume 30 | Issue 2

Article 17

2008

Abstracts, Notes of Contributors, Editorial Board

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Recommended Citation

Collett, Anne, Abstracts, Notes of Contributors, Editorial Board, *Kunapipi*, 30(2), 2008.
Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol30/iss2/17>

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Abstract

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ABSTRACTS

ANNE COLLETT

‘Pink Icing and the Sticky Question of Popular Culture’

Taking Mordecai’s recent collection of short stories, *Pink Icing* (2006), as a case study, this essay examines how the local and global are played out in the literary life of the author, in the short stories themselves, and in the publication and distribution of the book. Concomitantly, the essay addresses the question of popular culture: in what way this collection might be seen to constitute such, and how its location in a ‘local’ or ‘global’ context might affect a determination of popular or literary, familiar or exotic.

ERIC DOUMERC

‘Moqapi Selassie: Dub Poetry in Birmingham’

Performance poetry today in England is an offshoot of dub poetry and developed in England in the 1980s thanks to the work of poets like Levi Tafari and Benjamin Zephaniah. These poets tried to revitalise the dub poetry art form after it reached an impasse in the mid-1980s due to its over-reliance on a limited number of themes and aesthetic choices. The dub poets of the 1970s had worked in the protest mode, which in itself was associated with reggae music, to produce a type of poetry that had dealt mainly with social themes like poverty, life in Jamaica’s ghettos and violence. By the early 1980s some performance poets tried to move away from such themes by concentrating on the importance of ancestral culture and by trying to avoid relying on reggae rhythms and social themes which had become something of a convention by the 1980s. In Birmingham dub poetry is associated with Moqapi Selassie, a performer who has been active for more than twenty years now. Selassie is a modern-day dub poet inasmuch as his poetry is communal, celebrates ancestral culture and is marked by a strong protest element, but it is also characterised by a more private side that repays close study. His poetry also works on the printed page and is quite subtle, using a specific spelling to force the reader to focus on certain key words. Moqapi Selassie’s is at the crossroads of dub poetry and performance poetry and is thus a form of modern oral poetry.

ANNALISE FRIEND

‘African Drumming in Australia: White Men Can’t Drum?’

This essay addresses questions of identity that are raised by the practice of African drumming in Australia. These are as follows: what stereotypes are invoked in the marketing and practice of African drumming events in Australia, and do these stereotypes remain fixed in a context where participants have diverse ethnic heritage, and drum for a variety of reasons? Does the popularity of African drumming in Australia across a wide range of social and ideological groupings point to a desire to trace roots to an ultimate African homeland? Can this popularity also be read as a ‘re-embedding’ response in reaction to the disembedded aspects of a globalised, particularly urban, Australia? By asking these questions I explore some of the

complexities present in the physical act of playing in rhythm, which may appear to be a simple somatic process free from cultural politics, but its contexts suggest that issues of ownership and imitation may still be present. Complexities attach in particular to opposing stereotypes of the primitive, innately rhythmic black male drummer, and the imitative, hapless white man. Even if complicated or inverted, the power of these stereotypes remains, particularly in the marketing of drumming events and in the motivations of many participants.

MICHAEL MCMILLAN

‘The “West Indian” Front Room: Reflections on a Diasporic Phenomenon’

The front room is a phenomenon that resonates throughout the African Caribbean Diaspora and the cultural appropriation of the Victorian parlour as created by the European colonial elite in the Caribbean. This is the room in the home reserved for guests and therefore, as a public space in the private domain, it reflects through its aesthetics the moral values, religious devotion and consumer desires of its creators. This essay will explore through visual images of *The ‘West Indian’ Front Room* installation/exhibition curated by me (Geffrye Museum 2005–06), how Caribbean migrant women in the UK invested in material culture in the home to reinvent themselves as black women and ‘good’ mothers. The narrative of the front room’s creation shows that objects such as artificial flowers, ‘The Last Supper’, crochet, plastic-covered sofas, carpets with floral patterns, and Jim Reeves, have layered meanings that are generated and shaped by identity, gender, generation, migration and diaspora. As an aspirational space, where family photographs and tokens of achievement adorn the walls, it also reflects middle class values in the Caribbean and working class respectability in the wider diaspora. The legacy of the front room is symbolised through the 2nd and 3rd generation’s negotiation of tradition and modernity in the context of hybrid identities.

RACHAEL MORDECAI

“‘The same bucky-massa business’”: Peter Tosh and I-an-I at the One Love Peace Concert’

This article analyses Peter Tosh’s performance at the One Love Peace Concert in Kingston, Jamaica, in April 1978. It positions Tosh’s famously subversive performance on that occasion within the broader contestation over the nature of Jamaican identity that characterised the decade of the 1970s, arguing that Tosh enacts a construction of Jamaican-ness predicated upon: blackness as the fundamental basis of belonging, awareness and action; the combination of righteousness and defiance; and a long historical view of the experience of black people in diaspora. Combining these elements throughout a series of songs and speeches, Tosh moves beyond a simple gesture of defiance towards Jamaica’s political establishment, offering instead a radically redemptive vision of black Jamaicans as resistant, interconnected, powerful, and the agents of their own liberation.

EMMANUEL OBIECHINA

‘Market Literature in Nigeria’

This essay outlines the rise and fall of a pamphlet literature that developed in Onitsha, Nigeria immediately after WWII. It examines the context, content and form of ‘Market Literature’: a popular literature written ‘by Nigerians for Nigerians’. Its main objectives were a combination of the educational and the entertaining — to reform morals and manners, to give advice on all manner of individual, family and social ‘questions’, and to provide a forum for the appraisal of historical and contemporary politics and political leaders. This was a literature that actively engaged writers and readers (many of whom had little formal education) in the creation of, and adjustment to, a rapidly modernising African culture and society.

STEPHEN DERWENT PARTINGTON

‘Underneath the Umbrella of Hope: Syncretism as Solution in the Dialogic Poetry of Mukoma wa Ngugi’

For many years — arguably since the 1960s/70s *Songs* of the Ugandan poet, Okot p’Bitek — the Anglophone poetry of the East African region has suffered the same misfortune as the genre internationally: a comparative lack of critical and theoretical attention in relation to, say, the novel. This essay focuses on ‘Underneath the Umbrella of War’, a representative poem from the debut collection of Kenya’s young Mukoma wa Ngugi, son of the novelist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o. The essay argues that Mukoma is an example of what I have termed the Janus Poet, a literary producer who writes from the position of Salman Rushdie’s ‘transplanted man’ — one who lives and writes from and for ostensibly different cultures. It is proposed that his unique situation, in-between cultures, enables him to write a genuinely international poem that offers the reader the chance to actively participate in the creation of meaning, identifying the new imperial (economic) causes of global warfare and participating in the possibility of peace. Written from the USA by a Kenyan, this poem challenges both the isolationist Western reader to responsibly look outwards to the world and the Kenyan reader at home to consider how her/his condition of subjugation is affected. At the same time, it frees certain disenfranchised sections of the American citizenry from the blanket anti-Americanism that is at times suffered by the population of an entire country. A hopeful and liberating poem, ‘Underneath the Umbrella of War’ gives a glimpse of that literary and leftist political freshness that is evident in much of post-Moi government Kenya’s New Generation writing.

JENNIFER RUTHERFORD

‘Melancholy and The Magpie: Coetzee’s Amoro-Dolorous Duo’

In *Diary of a Bad Year*, ‘the tears of things’ are excluded from the essayist’s rational/ moral discourse but so too is his aggression. In splitting the page, Coetzee focuses attention on the way moral and political discourse proceeds as if it issues from a subject uncompromised by animal spirits. Focusing on the magpie, as the metatope of the novel, I read *Diary of a Bad Year* as a meditation on melancholy.

The novel questions how critical and cultural thought can embody its melancholy in an age when intellectual thought is disenfranchised, and where the moral projects of intellectuals have driven vast numbers of people into oppression. I suggest that Coetzee is asking the reader to ponder the being of the Western intellectual, to refocus attention from cause to condition. If modernity's bird's eye view of the world — a view uncluttered by religious consolation, unsupported by mechanical solidarity, and unregulated by tradition and taboo — delivers the modern thinker into a melancholic condition, might there be another way of embodying reason and thereby melancholy differently?

KARINA SMITH

‘Resisting the “Cancer of Silence”: The Formation of Sistren’s “Feminist Democracy”’

This essay examines Sistren’s formation of a ‘feminist democracy’ in the 1980s to resist the negative forces of globalisation. The essay argues that Sistren found itself in the contradictory position of protesting against the impact of late global capitalism at the same time as its work was co-opted by development agencies whose agendas follow capitalist scripts. By looking at Sistren’s community outreach work, collective organisational structure, and transnational feminist alliances, this essay will assess the extent to which Sistren’s work fits with the concept of ‘feminist democracy’ and at the same time complicates and contests it.

ROBERTO STRONGMAN

‘The Afro-Diasporic Body in Haitian Vodou and the Transcending of Gendered Cartesian Corporeality’

This essay advances the notion of transcorporeality as the distinct Afro-Diasporic cultural representation of the human psyche as multiple, removable and external to a body that functions as its receptacle. This unique view of the body, preserved in its most evident form in African religious traditions on both sides of the Atlantic, allows the re-gendering of the bodies of initiates. The culture of Haitian Vodou provides powerful examples of these cross-gender identifications through the phenomenon of trance possession, mystic marriages and zombification. I propose particular interpretations of filmic and literary texts in order to explain how the distinct Afro-Diasporic notions of corporeality of Haitian Vodou produce local categories same-sex desire for practitioners of this religion. René Depestre’s *Hadrianna dans tous mes rêves* is a novel in which the female protagonist becomes identified with a male Vodou deity, or Lwa, during Carnival. Frankétienne’s *Adjanoumelezo* utilises spiralist literary techniques to reveal the potential for gendered ambivalence in Vodou. Documentary film-makers Anne Lescot and Laurence Magloire foreground the role of queer male Vodou initiates in the worship of the female deity Erzulie Dantor in their celebrated film *Des Hommes et Dieux*.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ANNE COLLETT teaches in the English Literatures Program at the University of Wollongong, Australia. She has published widely on 20th century postcolonial women's writing, with particular focus on poetry and a comparative interest in visual arts. Essays on Australian authors Kate Llewellyn, Judith Wright and Beverley Farmer will be published in 2009. Currently Anne is writing (with Dorothy Jones) a comparative study of the representation of indigeneity and land in the work of Australian poet, Judith Wright and Canadian painter, Emily Carr.

ERIC DOUMERC teaches English at the university of Toulouse-Le Mirail in Toulouse, southwest France. His main research interests are the Caribbean oral tradition and its relationship with Caribbean poetry. Over the years Eric has published a number of articles in *Ariel*, *Kunapipi* and the *Journal of West Indian Literature*, a textbook for French university students — *Caribbean Civilisation: the English-Speaking Caribbean since Independence* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), and in 2007 he co-authored a poetry textbook with Wendy Harding entitled *An Introduction to Poetry in English* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail).

Performer, teacher, and student of rhythm, movement and writing, ANNALISE FRIEND is a doctoral candidate in the School of English Literature, Philosophy and Languages at the University of Wollongong. Her PhD topic is identity performance by contemporary hip-hop artists outside the USA. She is more broadly interested in theorising about contemporary cultural practice, particularly through the lens of her personal experience, and investigating 'gaps' between academic discussion and current events.

MICHAEL MCMILLAN is a writer, playwright, and curator/artist of Vincentian parentage. Recent plays produced include: *Blood for Britain* (BBC Radio 4 Drama, 2001), *Babel Junction* (Maya Productions, 2006), and *Master Juba* (Theatre Is & GLYPT, 2006). Books include: *The Black Boy Pub & Other Stories* (Wycombe District Council, 1997) and *Same Difference* (Daneford Trust, 2006). His exhibition, *The 'West Indian' Front Room* (Geffrye Museum 2005–06), had over 35,000 visitors and inspired the BBC4 documentary, *Tales from the Front Room. Van Huis Uit: The Living Room of Migrants in The Netherlands* (see www.thefrontroom.org). His recent exhibition, *The Beauty Shop* (198 Contemporary Arts & Learning), ran from January to March 2008). Michael is currently Visiting Professor of Creative Writing at the LCC (University of the Arts, London).

Born of Malawian parents in Harare Zimbabwe, SAMIR RAITI MTAMBA has published poetry in South African, American and Irish journals. He has taught in Zimbabwean high schools for a number of years and is now a Co-ordinator and Lecturer in the Applied Linguistics and Literature Programme at Zimbabwe Open University. Interests include Media Studies, Cultural Studies and Post Modernist

approaches to Literature. He is working on novels of J.M. Coetzee and the concept of 'the other' in Zimbabwean life and lore.

PAMELA MORDECAI is a trained language arts teacher. Her PhD is on the poetry of Walcott and Brathwaite. Her first prose work, *Pink Icing: Stories*, appeared in 2006 to excellent reviews. She has published four collections of poetry, *Journey Poem*; *De Man, a Performance Poem*; *Certifiable*; and *The True Blue of Islands* and, with her husband Martin, a reference work, *Culture and Customs of Jamaica*. She has written five books for children as well as numerous language arts textbooks. *Writing Home*, yet to be published, is her first novel (see <http://www.pamelamordecai.com>). She blogs at <http://jahworld-pmordecai.blogspot.com>.

RACHEL MORDECAI received her doctorate from the University of Minnesota, and teaches in the English Department of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her primary areas of teaching and research interest are Caribbean and multicultural American literature. Beyond these, her research interests include African diaspora culture; history, memory and narrative; autobiography and *testimonio*; and ethnography in literature. She is currently at work on a book about the role of expressive culture in negotiating and recording the political crisis of the 1970s in Jamaica.

Educated at University College, Ibadan and University of Cambridge where he obtained his doctoral degree in English, EMMANUEL OBIECHINA retired as professor of English from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in 1990. Subsequently, he has held senior visiting appointments at institutions in the United States: at Ferrum College; University of Pittsburgh at Bradford; University of Kansas at Lawrence; and Harvard University. Emmanuel's publications include *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*; *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*; and *Africa Shall Survive* [essays].

STEPHEN DERWENT PARTINGTON has published a critically acclaimed Kenyan poetry collection, *SMS & Face to Face* (Phoenix, 2003), with another to follow soon. His articles and reviews have appeared in a number of journals, and he contributes frequently to Kenyan literary debates in the national press. He completed postgraduate studies at York and Oxford.

KIRSTEN HOLST PETERSEN is Associate Professor at Roskilde University, Denmark. Her area of research and teaching is postcolonial literature, with an emphasis on African literature and women's contributions. Her most recent publication is, together with Mai Palmberg, 'Whose Biafra? An Analysis of Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*' (forthcoming).

ADEL RIDDEN is an independent scholar who lives on the south coast of NSW, Australia. His area of research interest is postcolonial poetry, with recent focus on contemporary Caribbean literature and literary culture.

A senior lecturer in the English program at the University of Melbourne, JENNIFER RUTHERFORD is the author of *The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Imaginary*, and the director of *Ordinary People*, a documentary on the One Nation movement. She has recently edited *The Poetics of Australian Space*, with Barbara Holloway (forthcoming UWA Press, 2009).

OLIVE SENIOR is the author of ten books of poetry, fiction and non-fiction. She is a recipient of the Gold Medal of the Institute of Jamaica among other awards. Her poetry book, *Over the Roofs of the World*, (Insomniac Press 2005) was shortlisted for Canada's Governor-General's Award for Literature and *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) is a textbook in Caribbean schools. Her short story collection, *Summer Lightning* (1986), won the Commonwealth Writers Prize and was followed by *Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995). She is also the author of *The Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* (2004) and the poetry book *Shell* (Insomniac Press 2007), her latest. She lives in Toronto, Canada and Montego Bay, Jamaica.

KARINA SMITH teaches Literary and Gender Studies at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. She has published on Sistren Theatre Collective's work in *Kunapipi*, *Situation Analysis*, *MaComere*, and *Modern Drama*.

ROBERTO STRONGMAN is Assistant Professor in the Department of Black Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He received his Ph.D. in Literature from the University of California, San Diego in 2003. Roberto's interdisciplinary approach encompasses the fields of Religion, History, and Sexuality in order to further his main area of research and teaching: Comparative Caribbean Cultural Studies. Roberto has published work in *Journal of Haitian Studies*; *Journal of Caribbean Studies*; *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*; *Kunapipi*; *Wadabagei*; and the *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*. He is currently preparing his first book, *Black Atlantic Transcorporealities*, for publication.

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